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THE GENESIS FLOOD NARRATIVE: CRUCIAL ISSUES IN THE CURRENT DEBATE¹

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Introduction

The purpose of this article is to examine major interrelated issues that are present in current discussions about the biblical Flood narrative of Gen 6-9. These include such questions as: the unity and literary genre of these chapters, the nature and extent of the biblical Flood, the relationship between history and theology in the Flood narrative, and the relationship of the biblical Flood narrative to other ANE flood stories. There are three major interpretations of Gen 6-9: (1) nonhistorical (mythological) interpretations suggest that Gen 6-9 is a theologically motivated account redacted from two different literary sources (J and P) and largely borrowed from other ANE mythological flood traditions; (2) limited or local flood theories narrow the scope of the Genesis Flood to a particular geographical location or locations (usually in Mesopotamia); and (3) traditional views regard Gen 6-9 as a unified, historically reliable narrative describing a worldwide, global Flood, and written as a polemic against other ANE Flood stories. The major issues with regard to the biblical Flood narrative may be summarized under one of three opposing alternatives: (1) nonhistorical (mythological) vs. historical interpretations of the Flood; (2) limited/local vs. universal/global Flood interpretations; and (3) theories of dependence on ANE traditions vs. theories of theological polemic. In the pages that follow, each of these three opposing alternatives is briefly discussed. Special attention is given to the question of the extent of the Genesis Flood, building upon and advancing beyond my previous study of this issue.² The position set forth in this article is that only the traditional understanding of a literal, historical, global Flood does full justice to the biblical data and that this interpretation is crucial for Flood theology in Genesis and for the theological implications drawn by later biblical writers.

Nonhistorical (Mythological) vs. Historical Interpretations of the Flood

Nonhistorical (Mythological) Flood Interpretations

Proponents of a nonhistorical interpretation of the Genesis Flood narrative generally contend that Gen 6-9 is a mythological account

¹A version of this paper was presented at the Science and Religion Conference, Glacier View Ranch, Ward, Colorado, August 2003. Biblical translations are the author's.

²Richard M. Davidson, "Biblical Evidence for the Universality of the Genesis Flood," *Origins* 22 (1995): 58-73; revised and expanded under the same title in *Creation, Catastrophe, and Calvary*, ed. John T. Baldwin (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2000), 79-92.

comprised of two different literary sources (Jahwist and Priestly), largely borrowed from earlier ANE mythological traditions and woven together by a redactor for the primary purpose of affirming the theological distinctives of Israel's faith.³

Those advancing a nonhistorical interpretation often acknowledge that the final redactor of Genesis intended the Flood narrative of Gen 6-9 to be taken as a literal account, as well as its having theological significance;⁴ but in light of the "assured results" of modern scientific investigation, they insist that the historical nature of the Flood narrative must be rejected in favor of recognizing its essentially mythological and theological (nonhistorical) character. Thus, the early part of Genesis (chaps. 1-11) is often separated from the rest of the book and is labeled as primeval myth, historicizing myth, tales, sagas, legends, or the like.⁵ The crucial question is, Can such partitioning of Genesis into "primeval" (nonhistorical) and patriarchal (historical) sections be justified within the text of Genesis itself, with the Flood narrative confined to the former (nonhistorical) section? To this we now turn our attention.

A Historical Interpretation of the Flood Narrative

Two important literary-structural elements tie the Flood narrative together with the rest of the book of Genesis and support the internal unity and historicity of Gen 6-9: the use of the word *tôlêdôt* ("generations, account, history," 13 times in the book) and the symmetrical literary structure of the Flood narrative.

1. *Tôlêdôt*. Each narrative section of the book of Genesis begins (or ends) with the term *tôlêdôt*.⁶ The term means literally "begettings" or "bringings-forth" (from the verb *yâlad*, "to bring forth, beget") and

³This is the prevailing view of historical-critical scholarship. See, e.g., Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis: A Commentary*, rev. ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1972), 116-134; Walter Brueggemann, *Genesis, Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1982), 73-88; and Terence E. Fretheim, "Genesis," NIB (Nashville: Abingdon, 1994), 388-389.

⁴James Barr summarizes: "[S]o far as I know there is no professor of Hebrew or Old Testament at any world-class university who does not believe that the writer(s) of Genesis 1-11 intended to convey to their readers the ideas that . . . Noah's flood was understood to be worldwide, and to have extinguished all human and land animal life except for those in the ark" (cited by Alvin Plantinga, "Evolution, Neutrality, and Antecedent Probability: A Reply to McMullin and Van Till," in *Intelligent Design Creationism and Its Critics: Philosophical, Theological, and Scientific Perspectives* [Cambridge: MIT Press, 2001], 217).

⁵Of course, many critical scholars reject the historicity of all of Genesis, including the patriarchal narratives. So, e.g., von Rad writes: "The old, naive idea of the historicity of these narratives as being biographically reliable stories from the life of the patriarchs must be abandoned" (Von Rad, *Genesis*, 40). For von Rad and many others, what is stated regarding the nonhistoricality of the patriarchal narratives applies even more to the "primeval history" of Gen 1-11.

⁶Gen 2:4; 5:1; 6:9; 10:1, 32; 11:10, 27; 28:12-13; 25:19; 36:1, 9; 37:2.

implies that Genesis is the "history/account of beginnings."⁷ Walter Kaiser has carefully analyzed the literary form of Gen 1-11 in light of this *tôlêdôt* structure and shown that this whole section of Genesis should be taken as "historical narrative prose."⁸

The term *tôlêdôt* is used as the heading for the Flood account (6:9), thereby connecting it with the rest of the book of Genesis and indicating that the author intended this narrative to be as historically veracious as the rest of Genesis.⁹ One cannot logically accept that the author of Genesis intended only some sections of the *tôlêdôt*, such as the accounts of the patriarchs, to be historical, while making others, such as the Flood account, to be only theological in nature. As Kenneth Mathews aptly states:

The recurring formulaic *toledôth* device [of the book of Genesis] shows that the composition was arranged to join the historical moorings of Israel with the beginnings of the cosmos. In this way the composition forms an Adam-Noah-Abraham continuum that loops the patriarchal promissory blessings with the God of cosmos and all human history. The text does not welcome a different reading for Genesis 1-11 as myth versus the patriarchal narratives. . . . [I]f taken as theological story alone, the interpreter is at odds with the historical intentionality of Genesis.¹⁰

2. *The Symmetrical Literary Structure of the Flood Narrative.* The chiasmic literary structure of Gen 6-9, as recognized by numerous scholars and displayed on page 53,¹¹ provides weighty evidence for the unity of the Flood narrative. Instead of these chapters being divided into small textual units (J and P) as suggested by the Documentary Hypothesis, the narrative is a single literary unit.¹² A close reading of the Flood narrative as a coherent literary whole, with particular attention to the chiasmic structure, resolves apparent discrepancies in the Genesis account.¹³ In the literary structure of the Flood narrative, the genealogical frame or envelope construction (Gen 5:32 and 9:28-29) plus the secondary

⁷J. B. Doukhan, *The Genesis Creation Story: Its Literary Structure*, Andrews University Seminary Dissertation Series, 5 (Berrien Springs: Andrews University Press, 1978), 167-220; see also K. A. Mathews, *Genesis 1:1-11:26*, NAC (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1996), 26-41.

⁸W. C. Kaiser Jr., "The Literary Form of Genesis 1-11," in *New Perspectives on the Old Testament*, ed. J. B. Payne (Waco: Word, 1970), 48-65.

⁹Doukhan, *The Genesis Creation Story*, 167-220.

¹⁰Mathews, 41, 111.

¹¹Adapted from William H. Shea, "The Structure of the Genesis Flood Narrative and Its Implications," *Origins* 6 (1979): 22-23. For a similar structural analysis, see Bernard W. Andersen, "From Analysis to Synthesis: The Interpretation of Gen 1-11," *JBL* 97 (1978): 38. This basic palistrophic structure is recognized by numerous recent commentators.

¹²U. Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Genesis*, trans. Israel Abrahams (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1964), 2:30-34; Shea, 8-29.

¹³G. J. Wenham, "The Coherence of the Flood Narrative," *VT* 28 (1978): 336-348; Shea; G. F. Hasel, *Understanding the Living Word of God* (Mountain View: Pacific Press, 1980), 49-50, 150-151.

genealogies (Gen 6:9-10; 9:18-19) actually provide powerful indicators that the account is intended to be factual history.¹⁴

The Genesis Flood narrative presents profound theology. But this theology is always *rooted* in history. Any attempt to separate theology and history in the biblical narratives does so by imposing an external norm, such as Greek dualism, upon the text. Read on its own terms, the biblical narratives, including the Flood narrative, defy attempts to read them as nonhistorical theology.

Limited/Local vs. Universal/Global Flood Interpretations

Limited/Local Flood Interpretations

Limited flood theories narrow the extent of the Genesis Flood to a particular geographical region (usually Mesopotamia).¹⁵ These theories rest primarily on scientific arguments that present seemingly difficult geological, biological, and anthropological problems for a universal flood.¹⁶ However, as Bruce Waltke points out: "The geological arguments favoring a local flood assume that the history of the earth's geology is uniform."¹⁷ A number of recent scientific studies provide a growing body of evidence for diluvial catastrophism instead of uniformitarianism.¹⁸

¹⁴Scriptural narratives are often placed in intricate and symmetrical literary forms, such as chiasms or panel writing, to highlight important theological points in the narrative without distorting the historical account. Cf. D. A. Dorsey, *The Literary Structure of the Old Testament: Genesis-Malachi* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999), 15-44.

¹⁵See, e.g., Fretheim, 388: "The Genesis account should be related to a major flood in the Mesopotamian valley, which in time was interpreted as a flood that covered the then known world." W. Ryan and W. Pitman suggest that the Genesis Flood is related to a gigantic flood in the area of the Black Sea (*Noah's Flood: The New Scientific Discoveries about the Event that Changed History* [New York: Simon and Schuster, 1998]).

¹⁶E.g., J. P. Lewis notes that "scholars are agreed that archaeological evidence for a universal flood in the historical past is wanting" ("Flood," *ABD* 2:798). Cf. D. C. Boardman, "Did Noah's Flood Cover the Entire World? No," in *The Genesis Debate: Persistent Questions about Creation and the Flood*, ed. R. F. Youngblood (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1990), 212-223; A. C. Custance, *The Flood: Local or Global?* Doorway Papers 9 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1979), 28-58; D. Kidner, *Genesis: An Introduction and Commentary*, TOTC, ed. D. J. Wiseman (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1967), 93-95; B. Ramm, *The Christian View of Science and Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1954), 232-249; R. Youngblood, ed., *The Genesis Debate: Persistent Questions about Creation and the Flood* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1977), 171-210.

¹⁷Bruce K. Waltke, *Genesis: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 133.

¹⁸E.g., H. G. Coffin and R. H. Brown, *Origin by Design* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1983); A. M. Rehwinkel, *The Flood in the Light of the Bible, Geology, and Archaeology* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1951); A. A. Roth, "Are Millions of Years Required to Produce Biogenic Sediments in the Deep Ocean?" *Origins* 12 (1985): 48-56; idem, "Catastrophism—Is It Scientific?" *Ministry* 59 (1986): 24-26; idem, "Those Gaps in the Sedimentary Layers," *Origins* 15 (1988): 75-85; idem, *Origins: Linking Science and Scripture* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1998); idem, "The Grand Canyon and the Genesis Flood," in *Creation, Catastrophe, and Calvary* (Hagerstown: Review and Herald, 2000), 93-107; J. C. Whitcomb, *The World That Perished*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1988); J. C. Whitcomb and H. M. Morris, *The Genesis Flood* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1961).

E The flood proper

b The flood crests
 The ark rests
 God remembered Noah
 (8:1-5)

a The flood rises. **a'** The flood abates
 (7:17-24) (8:6-12)

D Preliminary to D' After the flood the flood

d Enters the ark **d'** Exits the ark
 (7:11-16) (8:13-19)

c Brings in clean animals **c'** Noah's sacrifice
 (7:6-10) (8:20-22)

b Brings in clean animals **b'** Noah's diet
 (7:1-5) (9:1-7)

a My covenant with you **a'** My covenant with
 (6:11-22) you (9:8-17)

C Secondary genealogy C' Secondary genealogy
 (6:9-10) (9:18-19)

B Prologue: man's B' Epilogue: man's
 wickedness (6:1-8) wickedness (9:20-27)

A Primary genealogy A' Primary genealogy
 (5:32) (9:28-29)

e The flood crests, the ark rests,
 God remembers Noah (8:1)

d 150 days prevail **d'** 150 days waters abate
 (7:24) (8:3)

c 40 days of the flood **c'** 40 days first birds
 (7:12, 17) sent out (8:6)

b 7 days till the flood **b'** 7 days next bird
 (7:10) sent out (8:10)

a 7 days till 40-day **a'** 7 days last bird
 storm (7:4) sent out (8:12)

Local flood theories assert that biblical terminology used to describe the extent of the Flood should be understood in a relative rather than absolute universal sense. Therefore, seemingly universal terms imply a limited locality, thereby appearing to indicate universality within the writer's worldview but a limited scope in terms of the modern worldview.¹⁹ This claim is examined in the section that follows.

The Global Flood Interpretation

Biblical Terminology Expressing the Global Extent of the Flood

Perhaps the most important type of biblical evidence for a global Flood is the specific all-inclusive terminology found within the Genesis account itself.²⁰ There are some thirty different terms, expressions, or complexes of terminology in Gen 6-9 and elsewhere in Scripture, many echoing their intertextual counterparts in the account of global creation in Gen 1-2, that specifically indicate the universal, global extent of the Flood.²¹

1. "*Humankind*." The divine purpose given for the bringing of the Flood makes explicit its universal scope: "And the Lord said, 'I will destroy humankind [*hā'ādām*] whom I have created from the face of the earth; both man, and beast, creeping thing and birds of the air, for I am sorry that I have made them' (Gen 6:7; cf. vv. 5, 7; 8:21). The reference to "humankind whom I have created" is clearly an allusion to the creation of humankind (*hā'ādām*) in Gen 1:26-28. Nothing less than a complete destruction of the human race (except for Noah and his family, 6:8; 7:1) seems envisaged. Given the length of time from creation (over 1,650 years minimum according to the canonical MT), the longevity of the antediluvians (nearly a thousand years on average, see Gen 5 and 11), and God's command at creation to "fill the earth" (Gen 1:28), it is highly unlikely, from the perspective of the Hebrew canon, that the pre-Flood population would have stayed only in Mesopotamia. Thus, based upon the evidence supplied by the narrator of Genesis, the destruction of humanity would necessitate more than a local Flood.

¹⁹So, e.g., John Hartley, *Genesis*, NIBC (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2000), 106: "The local flood view is not necessarily the opposite of a global view. Since, from the biblical author's perspective, the deluge covered the known land mass, the flood is spoken of in categorical terms. But for that author the earth was a landmass surrounded by water, not a giant sphere. Consequently the categorical language does not require a global flood." Cf. Boardman, 223-226; Custance, 15-27; Kidner, 93-95; Ramm, 241-242.

²⁰Gerhard Hasel has provided a careful treatment of some of this terminology in three penetrating studies in issues of *Origins*: "The Fountains of the Great Deep," *Origins* 1 (1974): 67-72; idem, "The Biblical View of the Extent of the Flood," *Origins* 2 (1975): 77-95; idem, "Some Issues Regarding the Nature and Universality of the Genesis Flood Narrative," *Origins* 5 (1978): 83-98.

²¹For further discussion of some of these points, see Richard M. Davidson, "Biblical Evidence for the Universality of the Genesis Flood," *Origins* 22 (1995): 58-73, esp. 60-64.

2. *"The Earth."* The term *hā'āreṣ* ("the Earth," 46 times in the Flood narrative, see, e.g., Gen 6:12, 13, 17) always appears without an accompanying genitive of limitation in Gen 6-9. It clearly parallels and intertextually harks back to the same usage in the account of worldwide, global creation in Gen 1:1, 2, 10.²² In Prov 8:26, the poetic version of creation that echoes the Genesis account, the term *hā'āreṣ* is used in poetic parallelism with the indisputably universal term *tēbēl* ("world"), thus providing further evidence that the Genesis creation and Flood terminologies are to be taken as global in extent.²³ The reference to God's intention to destroy "*all flesh with the earth [hā'āreṣ]*" (Gen 6:11) further shows that this term is universal in scope (see point no. 5 below).

3. *"Upon the face of all the Earth."* The phrase *al-pēnē kol-hā'āreṣ* ("upon the face of all the Earth"; Gen 7:3; 8:9) is a clear allusion to the same expression in the account of global creation (Gen 1:29; cf. Gen 1:2 for a related universal expression) and thus implies a universality of the same dimension as in creation. The Genesis narrator consistently uses a universal sense of the entire land surface of the globe when this phrase is applied outside of the Flood narrative (e.g., Gen 1:29; 11:4, 8, 9), with no indication in the Flood narrative of any less universality.²⁴

4. *"The face of the ground."* The phrase *pēnē hā'dāmāh* ("face of the ground"; Gen 7:4, 22, 23; 8:8, 13) occurs in parallel with the universal terms *hā'āreṣ* (7:23) and *al-pēnē kol-hā'āreṣ* (8:9). It likewise recalls its first usage in the global context of creation (Gen 2:6).

²²The term may, at times, be used without a genitive and still, in context, be limited in scope to a certain "land." However, the explicit intertextual link between the global creation and the Flood account (esp. Gen 6:6, 7) serves as the hermeneutical control and clearly gives a global context for its usage in Gen 6-9.

²³Some have argued that *hā'āreṣ* is more limited in nature than the term *tēbēl*, which means the world as a whole, dry land in the sense of continents, or globe. Therefore, it is argued, if Moses had wished to indicate the entire world, he would have used *tēbēl*. However, *tēbēl* is not used in the entire Pentateuch, including the creation and Flood accounts. The term is used only in poetic texts (39 times), usually as a poetic synonym in parallel with *hā'āreṣ*.

²⁴While the term "upon the face of all the earth" (*al-pēnē kol-hā'āreṣ*), or its shortened term "all the earth" (*kol-hā'āreṣ*) may have a limited meaning elsewhere in Scripture when indicated by the immediate context, it is the intertextual linkage to the creation account and not word study on later usage in the Hebrew Bible, that must be determinative for understanding the scope of the expression in the Flood narrative. In addition, the two places in Genesis where, in context, a similar phrase "upon all the face of the earth" is not universal [the land of the plain of Sodom and Gomorrah viewed by Abraham in Gen 19:28, and the famine mentioned in Gen 41:56], the Hebrew in these verses has a significant change in word order from elsewhere in Genesis to *al-kol pēnē hā'āreṣ* ("upon all the face of the earth") instead of *al-pēnē kol-hā'āreṣ* ("upon the face of all the earth"). These two latter passages indicate the shift from global to local context by making the word "all" (*kol*) modify "face/surface" and not "earth." Outside of Genesis, for a localized context of the term "upon the face of all the earth" (*al-pēnē kol-hā'āreṣ*), see, e.g., Deut 11:25; 1 Sam 30:16; 2 Sam 18:8; Dan 8:5; and perhaps Zech 5:3. For use of the shortened term "all the earth" (*kol-hā'āreṣ*) in a less than global context, see, e.g., Gen 41:57; Exod 10:5, 15; Num 22:5, 11; 1 Kgs 4:34; 10:24; and 2 Chron 36:23.

5. "*All flesh*." The term *kol-bāsār* ("all flesh"; Gen 6:12, 13, 17, 19; 7:16, 21; 8:17; 9:11, 15, 16, 17) is accompanied by additional phrases that recall the creation of animals and man (Gen 1:24, 30; 2:7), e.g., "in which is the breath of life" (Gen 6:17 and 7:15), "all in whose nostrils was the breath of the spirit of life" (Gen 7:21-22), and "every living creature" (Gen 9:10-12)—see below for discussion of these expressions.

When the word *kol* ("all") is placed before an indeterminate noun with no article or possessive suffix, as in Gen 6-9, it indicates totality.²⁵ Thus, God's announcement to destroy "all flesh" (Gen 6:13, 17) and the narrator's comment that "all flesh" died (Gen 7:21-22) with the exception of the inhabitants of the ark indicate universal destruction. The occurrence of *kol* plus the determinate noun *habbāsār* ("all the flesh") in Gen 7:15 also indicates totality as well as unity.

6. "*The end*." In Gen 6:13, the "eschatological" term *qēs* ("end") is introduced in the Flood narrative: "And God said to Noah, 'I have determined to make an end of all flesh.'" Linked to the universal phrase "all flesh" (discussed in point 5 above), this "end" clearly assumes universal, global dimensions in which the existence of the whole human race outside the ark is to be terminated. The term *qēs*, appearing later in the Hebrew canon and in the NT, becomes a technical term for the eschaton.

In the Flood narrative, the "eschatological" divine judgment involved a period of probation (Gen 6:3), followed by a judicial investigation ("The Lord saw," Gen 6:5; "I have determined," Gen 6:13, RSV),²⁶ the sentence (Gen 6:7), and its execution (the bringing of the Flood; Gen 7:11-24).²⁷ Warren Gage shows how Gen 1-7 is presented typologically within the Hebrew canon as a paradigm for the history of the world.²⁸ The reduplication of the motifs in Genesis only carries through the fourth narrative, implying that the fifth (universal judgment) will be fulfilled in the eschatological, cosmic judgment.²⁹

²⁵The term can occasionally express less than totality if the context demands.

²⁶So Nahum Sarna comments on Gen 6:7: "This phrase ['The Lord saw'] has juridical overtones, implying both investigation of the facts and readiness for action" (*Genesis: The Traditional Hebrew Text with New JPS Translation/Commentary*, JPS Torah Commentary [Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989], 47).

²⁷Cf. Cassuto, *Genesis*, 56-57.

²⁸Warren A. Gage, *The Gospel of Genesis: Studies in Protology and Eschatology* (Winona Lake: Carpenter, 1984), 7-16.

²⁹In addition to evidence for universal Flood typology within the Flood narrative itself, Isaiah indicates that the Flood is a type of covenantal eschatology (Isa 54:9) in his descriptions of the eschatological salvation of Israel (the "flood of mighty waters overflowing" (Isa 28:2); "the waters . . . shall not overwhelm" (Isa 43:2); God's "overflowing wrath" (Isa 54:8); and the "windows of heaven" (Isa 24:18), while the prophets Nahum (1:8) and Daniel (9:26) depict the eschatological judgment in language probably alluding to the Genesis Flood. As noted again later in this article, the NT writers also recognize the typological connection between Flood and eschatology. The salvation of Noah and his family in the ark finds its antitypical counterpart in NT eschatological salvation connected with water baptism (1 Pet 3:18-22; see Richard M.

7. *"Every living thing."* The phrase "every living thing" (*kol-hāḥay*), found in Gen 6:19 and 9:16, is linked with the phrase "of all flesh" discussed above and clearly expresses universality.

8. *"Every living creature."* The Hebrew phrase *kol-nep̄eš ḥayyā* ("every living soul/creature") is synonymous to the expression "every living thing" mentioned above and constitutes another universalistic expression (Gen 9:10-12).

9. *"All in whose nostrils was the breath of the spirit of life."* This phrase, *kōl ʾāšer nišmat-rūaḥ ḥayyim beʾappāyāw*, found in Gen 7:22, elaborates the similar phrase "all . . . in which is the breath of life" in Gen 6:17 and 7:15. These expressions are clear allusions to the creation account (Gen 2:7) and indicate global dimensions, not merely a local setting.

10. *"All existence."* The similar term *kol-hayēqūm* means, literally, "all existence" (Gen 7:4, 23). This is one of the most inclusive terms available to the Hebrew writer to express totality of life. All existence (on the land, as later specified) was destroyed in the Flood!

11. *"All . . . that I have made."* Further evidence for the global extent of the term "all existence" [*kol-hayēqūm*] is the addition of the clause "all existence that I have made" (*ʾāšer ʾāśītī*) (7:4), which is an allusion to creation. Everything that God had made on the earth (excluding the sea creatures, as noted below, and the inhabitants of the ark) was destroyed.

12. *"Only Noah and those who were with him in the ark remained alive."* In Gen 7:23, the term "all existence" [*kol-hayēqūm*] has yet another clause added to indicate totality: *wayiṣṣāʾer ʾak-nōaḥ wāʾāšer ʾittō battēbā* ("only Noah and those who were with him in the ark remained alive"). This first reference to a "remnant" in Scripture also provides a powerful statement of universality regarding the extent of the Flood.

13. *"Everything on the Earth."* The expression of what died in the Flood, *kōl ʾāšer-bāʾāreš*, literally "all which is on the Earth" (Gen 6:17), is another universalistic expression in the Flood narrative, which, in light of the global meaning of "the Earth" (*ḥāʾāreš*) in these chapters (see discussion above), constitutes a statement of total destruction of terrestrial life on planet Earth.

14. *"All on the dry."* According to Gen 7:22, the creatures that died in the Flood included *mikkōl ʾāšer behārābā* (literally, "from all which was on the dry"). This statement not only provides another universalistic expression for the Genesis Flood, but also makes clear that this worldwide destruction is limited to terrestrial creatures and does not include the inhabitants of the sea.

15. *"Under the whole heaven."* The phrase "under the whole heaven"

(*tahat kol-hāššāmāyim*; Gen 7:19) is found in two verses that describe the extent of the Flood: "and the waters prevailed so mightily upon the earth that all the high mountains *under the whole heaven* were covered. The waters prevailed fifteen cubits upward, and the mountains were covered" (7:19, 20, emphasis added). John Skinner notes that this passage "not only asserts its [the flood's] universality, but so to speak proves it, by giving the exact height of the waters above the highest mountains."³⁰ The universal phrase "under the whole heaven," or "under all the heavens," also globalizes the phrase "under heaven" (Gen 6:17) in this same Flood context.³¹

H. C. Leupold observes that the writer of v. 19 is not content with a single use of *kol* ("all") in "all the high mountains," but "since 'all' is known to be used in a relative sense, the writer removes all possible ambiguity by adding the phrase 'under all the heavens.' A double 'all' (*kol*) cannot allow for so relative a sense. It almost constitutes a Hebrew superlative. So we believe that the text disposes of the question of the universality of the Flood."³²

16. "All the high mountains . . . were covered." The covering of "all the high mountains" (*kol-behārīm haggēbōhīm*) by at least 15 cubits (Gen 7:19-20) could not simply involve a local flood, since water seeks its own level across the surface of the globe. Even one high mountain covered in a local Mesopotamian setting would require that same height of water everywhere on the planet's surface.³³

Proponents of a local flood often object that a worldwide Deluge would imply "that the earth's surface was completely renovated during the

³⁰John Skinner, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Genesis*, ICC, 2d ed. (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1956), 1:165.

³¹The word "heaven," when alone, can have a local meaning (e.g., 1 Kgs 18:45), but here the context is clearly global. Ecclesiastes, which contains numerous allusions to creation, likewise utilizes the term "under heaven" with a universal intention (Eccl 1:13; 2:3; 3:1; cf. the parallel universal, worldwide expression "under the sun" in Eccl 1:3, 9; 2:11, 17). Cf. Mathews, 365.

³²H. C. Leupold, *Exposition of Genesis* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1942), 301-302. The phrase "under the whole heaven" is used six times in the OT outside of the Flood narrative with a universal meaning (see Deut 2:25; 4:19; Job 28:24; 37:3; 41:11; Dan 9:12). For example, the phrase is used to describe God's omniscience: "For He looks to the ends of the earth and sees under the whole heavens" (Job 28:24). Again, it depicts God's sovereignty: "Whatsoever is under the whole heaven is mine" (Job 41:11, KJV). Note that the usage in Deut 2:25, which describes "the nations under the whole heaven," is further qualified and limited by the phrase "who shall hear the report of you" and thus is potentially universal and not an exception to the universal sense.

³³In this connection, it is not necessary to postulate the existence of mountains as high as Mount Everest at the time of the Flood and thus to require waters covering the earth to a depth of six miles, as some proponents of a local flood suggest would be necessary. The antediluvian mountains were possibly much lower than at present. Passages in the book of Job may well be referring to the process of postdiluvian mountain uplift (see Job 9:5; 28:9), but Ps 104:5-9 probably refers to creation and not to postdiluvial activity, as is sometimes claimed.

flood year” and thus “prediluvian topography would have been exceedingly different from postdiluvian topography.” This implication, they claim, is in conflict with biblical evidence that “strongly suggests that prediluvian geography did basically resemble postdiluvian geography,”³⁴ particularly in regard to the topographical descriptions in connection with the Garden of Eden, e.g., the lands of Havilah and Cush and the four rivers, two of which (the Tigris and the Euphrates) were familiar to the readers of Genesis in Moses’ time.

Although there are some similarities between the prediluvian and postdiluvian topography, there are more differences. Two of the rivers, the Pishon and the Gihon, which apparently no longer existed in the time of the narrator, are mentioned in terms of where they used to flow in the postdiluvian areas of Havilah and Cush respectively. The other two rivers—the Tigris and Euphrates—are described as coming from a common source in the Garden of Eden, certainly far different from their present courses. Thus, the topographical descriptions in the early chapters of Genesis are in harmony with a worldwide Flood.

It has also been suggested that the reference to “all the high mountains” being covered (Gen 7:19) actually alludes to idolatrous “high places” similar to those mentioned later in the Prophets in their castigation of the fertility cults. Therefore, the Flood need rise no higher than the local antediluvian hills with their idolatrous cultic shrines.³⁵ Idolatry may well have been a part of the antediluvian rebellion against God, but it is never specifically mentioned as a reason for the Flood in the Genesis narrative; alleged intertextual linkages to idolatry in Ezekiel are weak and unconvincing.³⁶ Further, it is claimed that the phrase “all the high

³⁴Davis A. Young, *Creation and the Flood: An Alternative to Flood Geology and Theistic Evolution* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1977), 210.

³⁵Gordon J. Wenham, following the research of Eugen Drewermann, suggests that Gen 6:1-8 may be a polemic against the fertility cults (*Genesis 1-15*, WBC 1 [Waco: Word, 1987], 141). Warren Johns builds upon this hypothesis and further speculates that the language for “high mountains” in Gen 6-9 refers to the high places of idolatrous worship (“Theology, Science, and the Flood: A Close Reading of Genesis 6-9” [January 2004 revised version of an unpublished paper presented at the Science and Religion Conference, Glacier View Ranch, Ward, CO (August 2003)], 18-21).

³⁶Contra Warren Johns, “Exodus and Ezekiel the Inspired Keys to Unraveling the Mystery of the Flood,” and “Ezekiel the Inspired Key to the Flood, Genesis 6-9,” unpublished papers, 2000, 2001. Obviously, both the Flood narrative and the book of Ezekiel contain a message of divine judgment; and, therefore, some of the same terms appear, describing the wickedness of the people and the certainty and severity of judgment. There is even mention of “flooding rain” as one of the agents of judgment in Ezekiel (38:22). However, in the same verse there are other agents of judgment that will “rain down” upon the wicked, harking back to other earlier acts of divine judgment, such as “great hailstones, fire, and brimstone.” These latter agents of judgment may well allude to the time of the Exodus and the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, events that certainly did not focus upon idolatrous high places. The only ostensibly strong linkage between Ezekiel and alleged cultic practices in the Flood narrative is the mention of the “high mountains,” but as noted in the next footnote, this terminological parallelism does not hold up in the Hebrew original. Ezekiel does not provide the inspired intertextual key to

mountains” is “precise technical wording” for the high places of idolatrous worship in the Prophets and, therefore, this phrase should be given the same interpretation in the Flood narrative. However, this can only be argued from the English translations; in the Hebrew, *not one* of the alleged parallel passages in the Prophets contains *both* key terms, “high” (*gēbōhīm*) and “mountains” (*hārīm*) as in Gen 7:19.³⁷ Thus, it is very unlikely that the Prophets are alluding to idolatrous practices of the Flood narrative, nor does the phrase “all the high mountains” in the Flood narrative refer to cultic high places.³⁸

This conclusion is confirmed within the context of the narrative itself with the addition of the universalizing phrase “under the whole heaven” (Gen 7:19) and other language, making clear the general thrust of the surrounding verses of this section of the Flood narrative. From a literary perspective, the force of this narrative section is to portray the unimaginable crescendo of ever-rising waters.³⁹ Within the short span of forty-seven Hebrew words, the term “waters” occurs five times,

understanding the Flood narrative; instead, the Flood narrative, as well as other narratives such as the Exodus and Sodom and Gomorrah, provide the intertextual keys to Ezekiel as the models of judgment to which the prophet alludes.

³⁷The Hebrew phrase in Gen 7:19 is *kol behārīm hagēbōhīm* (“all the high mountains”), with the key terms *kol* (“all/every”), *hārīm* (“mountains”), and *gēbōhīm* (“high”). The alleged parallel passages in the Prophets (Former and Latter in the Hebrew Bible; Prophets and Historical Books in the English Bible arrangement of the canon) that refer to idolatrous high places include: Deut 12:2; 1 Kgs 4:23; 2 Kgs 16:4=2 Chron 28:4; 2 Kgs 17:10; Jer 2:20; 4:24; 17:2; Ezek 6:13; 20:28; 34:6, 14; Hos 4:13. The only passage in the Prophets that has all three of these terms is Isa 30:25, but the referent of this passage is not idolatrous high places but the abundant verdure of a new creation. I do not deny that Ezekiel utilized imagery from the Flood narrative (among other OT narratives) in describing both the sin (“corruption” and “violence”) and the punishment (e.g., “wiped out,” “flooding rains”) of Judah, but there is no intertextual hint in Ezekiel that the “high mountains” of the Flood narrative are to be interpreted as idolatrous cultic high places.

³⁸It is further argued that the phrase “tops of the mountains” (*rāʾšē behārīm*) in Gen 8:5 is a “technical expression” in the OT referring to the fertility-cult high places (Johns, “Theology, Science, and the Flood,” 27). Johns sets forth “all the usages in the OT for the expression ‘tops of the mountains,’” which includes three other passages besides Gen 8:5: Eze 6:13; Hos 4:12-13; and Joel 2:5. The passage in Joel 2:5, Johns acknowledges, does not refer to cultic high places. Johns fails to point out two other OT passages that employ this precise terminology and clearly have no relationship to fertility-cult high places: Judg 9:25, 36. Thus out of five occurrences of this expression besides Gen 8:5, only two refer to cultic high places. This hardly indicates that the phrase constitutes a “technical term” for idolatrous high places. (Note also another some thirteen OT references to the singular “top of the mountain” [*rōʾš bāhār*] and some four references to “top of the mountains” [*rōʾš hārīm*], none of which have idolatrous high places in view.) The context of Gen 8:5 makes clear that the expression “tops of the mountains” is not employed as a *terminus technicus* for cultic high places in this passage. The point of the phrase in Gen 8:5 is not a negative allusion to sites of idolatrous worship, but a positive, redemptive sign! The virtual return to precreation “chaos” brought about by the Flood—with water covering the entire globe—is now being reversed as the New Creation dawns and dry land appears as on the third day of creation (see Doukhan’s block parallelism and further discussion of uncreation, below).

³⁹Mathews, 379.

“increased” two times, “rose” three times, and “greatly” three times, all “to underscore the sense of the escalating waters.”⁴⁰ The escalation swells from the simple expression “increased” (v. 17), to “prevailed and greatly increased” (v. 18), to “prevailed exceedingly” (v. 19a), and then to the climax in the covering even of the highest mountains of the globe: “And the water rose higher and higher above the ground until all the highest mountains (*hārīm*) under the whole of heaven were submerged” (vv. 19b-20, NJB). This escalation of waters does not fit with an interpretation of “high mountains” as cultic high places on local hilltops, but connotes the quintessence of elevation in the rising waters, culminating in the covering of all the land surface of the globe.

17. “*All the fountains of the great deep.*” The phrase *kol-ma’yēnot tēhôm rabbāh* (“all the fountains of the great deep”; Gen 7:11; cf. 8:2) constitutes an intertextual link with the universal “deep” (*tēhôm*) or world-ocean described in the creation narrative in Gen 1:2.⁴¹ The “breaking up/bursting forth” (Heb. *niptāhū*, possibly referring to geological faulting) of *all* (*kol*)—not just some—of the fountains (i.e., subterranean water springs) of the great deep, using language drawn from creation and coupled in the same verse with the opening of the windows of the heavens, cannot refer only to a local scene, but rather has global implications. Gerhard Hasel perceptively concludes that “the bursting forth of the waters from the fountains of the ‘great deep’ refers to the splitting open of springs of subterranean waters with such might and force that together with the torrential downpouring of waters stored in the atmospheric heavens a worldwide flood comes about.”⁴²

This is not to say that the oceans supplied any new source of water for the Genesis Flood: the oceans were already in place. But the *fountains* of the “great deep,” which refer to fresh-water subterranean streams that may have surged up from the earth’s crust through the oceans as well as dry

⁴⁰Ibid.

⁴¹See Hasel, “The Fountains of the Great Deep,” 62-72, for full discussion. Compare with Ps 104:6 (also a creation context): “You covered it [the earth] with the deep [*tēhôm*] as with a garment; the waters were standing above the mountains.” The “breaking up” or “bursting forth” (Heb. *niptāhū*) of the fountains of the great deep is recognized as connected to creation in Prov 3:19-20, where the same two terms are employed as in Gen 7:11: “The Lord by wisdom founded the earth. . . ; by His knowledge the depths [*tēhômōt*] were broken up [*niptāhū*].” Prov 8:24, also in the context of creation, uses terms from Gen 7:11 in poetic parallelism: “When there were no depths [*tēhômōt*] I was brought forth, When there were no fountains [*ma’yēnot*] abounding with water.” That the expression *tēhôm rabbāh* (“great deep”) can in the OT refer to oceans as well as terrestrial water is apparent in Ps 36:6, which clearly contrasts the highest points on earth (the mountains) with the depths of the oceans (the great deep). The NLT captures the flow of this verse: “Your righteousness is like the mighty mountains, your justice like the ocean depths.” Isa 51:10 specifically places *tēhôm rabbāh* “great deep” in synonymous poetic parallelism with *yām* (“sea”): “Are You not the One who dried up the sea [*yām*], the waters of the great deep [*tēhôm rabbāh*]; that made the depths of the sea a road for the redeemed to cross over?”

⁴²Hasel, “The Fountains of the Great Deep,” 71.

land, combined with the torrential rains from above, raised the level of water to cover all the high mountains, thereby returning the earth virtually to its state described in Gen 1:2 ("darkness was on the face of the deep [*têhôm*] and the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters").

The divine creative work of separating the dry land from the waters (the third day of creation week) and the waters above from the waters below the firmament (the second day of creation week) was reversed during the Flood. The surface of the entire globe was once again covered by the *têhôm* (i.e., world-ocean). P. J. Harland summarizes: "The flood returned the world to the pre-creation state of one large ocean."⁴³

18. *The mabbûl*. The term *mabbûl* ("Flood/Deluge"; 12 occurrences in Genesis,⁴⁴ once in Ps 29:10) is reserved exclusively in the Hebrew Bible for reference to the Genesis Flood. Perhaps derived from the Hebrew root *ybl* ("to flow, to stream") or a *maqûl* pattern noun related to the Akkadian verb *nabûlu* (to destroy; literally "a destruction of waters"), the term is usually associated with *mayim* ("waters") in the Flood narrative and seems to have become "a technical term for waters flowing or streaming forth and as such designates the flood (deluge) being caused by waters. . . . *mabbûl* is in the Old Testament a term consistently employed for the flood (deluge) which was caused by torrential rains and the bursting forth of subterranean waters."⁴⁵ This technical term clearly sets the Genesis Deluge apart from all local floods and gives it a global context. The LXX reflects the technical meaning of the Hebrew *mabbûl* and only employs the Greek term translated *kataklysmos* ("flood, deluge") with reference to the Genesis Flood.

The vast array of universalistic terms for the extent of destruction that we have surveyed thus far in the Genesis Flood in Gen 6-9 is impressive when seen in isolation, but these expressions become even more significant when it is realized how many of them appear in clusters both before and after the Flood, in order to give the effect of total destruction. Note, for example, how, in Gen 6:17, God announces his intention to bring the Flood, utilizing six different universalistic expressions to indicate the global extent of the Deluge: "And I myself am bringing [1] the flood of waters [2] on the earth, to destroy [3] from under heaven [4] all flesh [5] in which is the breath of life; and [6] everything that is on the earth shall die." Further, after the Flood had done its destroying work, Gen 7:21-23 records the extent of destruction, this time using *ten* different universalizing expressions:

And [1] all flesh died [2] that moved on the earth: [3] birds and cattle

⁴³P. J. Harland, *The Value of Human Life: A Study of the Story of the Flood (Genesis 6-9)*, VTSupp 64 (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 92.

⁴⁴With the article: Gen 6:17; 7:6, 7, 10, 17; 9:11, 28; 10:1, 32; 11:10. Without the article: Gen 9:11, 15.

⁴⁵Hasel, "Some Issues Regarding the Nature and Universality of the Genesis Flood Narrative," 92-93. See also Michael A. Grisanti, "Mabbûl," NIDOTTE, ed. W. A. VanGemern (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), 2: 835, 836.

and beasts and every creeping thing that creeps on the earth, and every man [to be discussed below]. [4] All in whose nostrils was the breath of life, [5] all that was on the dry [land], died. So he destroyed [6] all living things [7] which were on the face of the ground: [8, a variation of no. 2 above] both man and cattle, creeping thing and bird of the air. [9] They were destroyed from the earth. [10] Only Noah and those who were with him in the ark remained alive.

Hasel observes that "there is hardly any stronger way in Hebrew to emphasize total destruction of 'all existence' of human and animal life on earth than the way it has been expressed [in Gen 6-9]. The writer of the Genesis flood narration employed terminology, formulae, and syntactical structures of the type that could not be more emphatic and explicit in expressing his concept of a universal, world-wide flood."⁴⁶

Besides the specific universalistic expressions examined above, other types of terminology in Gen 6-9 imply a global, not local, flood. These are summarized below.

19. *Terminology related to the ark and its construction.* The Genesis account utilizes a specific word for the ship built by Noah: *tēbā* ("ark"). This term, occurring in Gen 6-9 some 26 times, is employed nowhere else in Scripture except Exod 2:3, 5, where it describes the "ark" made out of bulrushes for baby Moses—who is probably depicted by this usage as a new Noah.⁴⁷ The worldwide extent of the Flood is underscored by the enormous size of the ark detailed in Gen 6:14-15. According to the biblical account, the dimensions of the ark were 300 x 50 x 30 cubits, and assuming a cubit is approximately 18 inches, this translates into 450 x 75 x 45 feet, with a conjectured displacement of 43,300 tons.⁴⁸ A ship of such immense proportions, not equaled till modern times, certainly bespeaks a deluge that transcends a local Mesopotamian flood.

20. *Terminology related to the purpose of the ark.* The stated purpose of the ark was "to keep species [*zera*^c, 'seed'] alive on the face of all the earth" (Gen 7:2-3; cf. 6:16-21). A massive ark filled with representatives of all nonaquatic animal species would be unnecessary if this were only a local flood, for these species could have been preserved elsewhere in the world. Yet, the biblical record specifically states that the animals were brought into the ark to preserve representatives of all of the various species (Gen 6:19-20).

21. *Terminology for the animals saved and destroyed.* The four terms used for the animals brought onto the ark are the following: *hayyā* ("beast/living creature"; or *hayyētō-ʾeres* "beast of the earth"), *ʿōp* ("birds"), *bēhēmā* ("cattle"), and *remeš* ("creeping things"). Some have claimed that the Flood account does not indicate that representatives of all air-breathing terrestrial animals went into the ark; they argue that

⁴⁶Hasel, "The Biblical View of the Extent of the Flood," 86.

⁴⁷Fretheim, 391.

⁴⁸Lewis, 2:799.

only the domesticated animals went in, while representatives of the wild animals and birds of prey survived outside the ark.⁴⁹ But such attempts have mistakenly sought to define the terms for classifications of animals in Gen 6-9 based upon later usage of these terms in the Hebrew Bible, not recognizing that the Flood account is recalling the usage of these same terms in the creation account. The intentional reuse in the Flood narrative of the same four terms that comprehensively describe the terrestrial animals of the creation account⁵⁰ stresses the point that representatives of all air-breathing terrestrial creatures created by God went on the ark and that none of these creatures survived the Flood outside the ark. Furthermore, accompanying inclusive language leaves no doubt that all terrestrial air-breathing animals are intended, both as represented within the ark and as what totally perished outside the ark. The notion that some terrestrial animals survived cannot be textually supported in the face of such categorical statements as found in Gen 7:21-23: "And all flesh died that moved on the earth. . . . All in whose nostrils was the breath of the spirit of life, all that was on the dry land,

⁴⁹See Frederick A. Filby, *The Flood Reconsidered: A Review of the Evidences of Geology, Archaeology, Ancient Literature and the Bible*, with a foreword by Stephen S. Short (London: Pickering and Inglis, 1970), 85-86. Cf. Johns, "Theology, Science, and the Flood," 2-7.

⁵⁰Gen 1 uses this list with several variations. In depicting the creation on the fifth day, v. 22 mentions the birds, while the depiction on the sixth day (vv. 24-25) refers to *hayyā* ("beast"), first, as a general category meaning "living creature," and, then, as divided into three subcategories: *bēhēmā* ("cattle"), *remes* ("creeping things"), and *hayyētō-eres* ("beasts of the earth"). In v. 26, humans are given dominion over only three categories of terrestrial animals: "birds of the air," "cattle" (*bēhēmā*), and "creeping things" (*remes*); there is no mention of the *hayyētō-eres* (unless the reading of the Syriac is accepted, which is far from certain). In v. 28, humanity's dominion over terrestrial animals is summarized by only two categories: "birds of the air" and "every living thing [*hayyā*] that moves [*rmš*, Qal participle] on the earth." Finally, in v. 30, in describing the food for the terrestrial animals, three categories are mentioned: "beast of the earth" (*hayyētō-eres*), "bird of the air," and everything that creeps [*rmš*, Qal participle] on the earth"; and this is further summarized by indicating that it includes everything on land in which is the "breath of life" (*nepeš hayyā*). In Gen 6:19-20, all four of the basic groups of animals (or four terms) are found entering the ark, and all four appear again in the list of Gen 7:14.

It is true that Gen 6 and 7 do not use the full phrase "beast of the earth" (*hayyētō-eres*) to refer to animals that entered the ark, but this phrase is clearly used in Gen 9:9-10 to indicate what was in the ark with Noah: "Behold, I establish My covenant with you . . . and with every living creature that is with you: the birds, the cattle, and every beast of the earth [*hayyētō-eres*] with you, of all that go out of the ark, every beast of the earth." Johns, 3, argues that the term "beast of the earth" in this verse refers to wild animals that were with Noah after the Flood but not with him in the ark. However, as Cassuto, *Genesis*, 131, points out, the purpose of the *Be* prefix "is to explain and particularize," and it occurs equally before all the terms used for the animals, including *hayyētō-eres* ("beast of the earth"). These categories of animals are all held together by one common *Be* prefix, and then comes the prepositional *min*, as Cassuto notes: "Here in the sense of 'that is.'" "That is"—referring to all the categories just mentioned—"as many as came out of the ark." The Hebrew thus makes clear that all the animals mentioned in Gen 9:9-10 came out of the ark.

In sum, the flood narrative of Gen 6 and 7 utilizes an abbreviated list of the terrestrial, air-breathing animals, such as found in Gen 1:26. The record in Gen 9:9-10 adds the additional term that is missing in previous chapters of the narrative.

died. So he destroyed all living things which were on the face of the ground. . . . They were destroyed from the earth."⁵¹ John Hartley summarizes by noting that in the Genesis Flood narrative "four references to the death of the animals, with differing verbs, stress that outside the ark no life that breathed survived."⁵²

Furthermore, if only a local flood were in view, the building of any ark at all, even for Noah and his family, would have been superfluous—God could simply have warned Noah and his family in time to escape from the coming judgment, just as he did with Lot in Sodom. But the point of the narrative concerning the ark is that there was no other escape; in the midst of the Flood "only Noah and those who were with him in the ark remained" (Gen 7:23).⁵³

22. *Terminology for the duration of the Flood.* The duration of the Genesis Flood ("And the waters prevailed [*wayyigbēru*] upon the earth a hundred and fifty days"; Gen 7:24) makes sense only with a worldwide flood. The *mabbāl* of torrential rain from above and jets of water from the fountains of the deep below continued 40 days (Gen 7:17). All the highest mountains were still covered five months after the Flood began, as the ark "rested" (Heb. *nūah*, "to be tranquil," the same root as the name of Noah), i.e., found tranquil waters⁵⁴ amid the still-covered mountains of Ararat (Gen 8:4). The tops of the mountains were not seen until after seven months (cf. Gen 7:11;

⁵¹We have already examined the universal, inclusive Hebrew terminology in these statements and shown their universal/global connotations in the context of the worldwide creation language to which they allude. It is also clear from Gen 6:19 that representatives of all the terrestrial air-breathing animals were brought into the ark: "And of every living thing of all flesh you shall bring two of every sort into the ark, to keep them alive with you; they shall be male and female." Later God clarifies that of "every clean animal" and of "each of the birds of the air" Noah was to take seven pairs (Gen 7:2). In obedience to God's command, "of clean beasts, of beasts that are unclean, of birds, and of everything that creeps on the earth, two by two they went into the ark, male and female" (Gen 7:9). Gen 7:13-15 emphatically repeats the universal, inclusive statement: "On the very same day Noah and Noah's sons . . . entered the ark—they and every beast after its kind, all cattle after their kind, every creeping thing that creeps on the earth after its kind, and every bird after its kind, every bird of every sort . . . two by two, of all flesh in which is the breath of life." This same comprehensive list is repeated two more times in Gen 8:17, 19 to name the animals coming out of the ark. Gen 9:10 explicitly adds the phrase *bayyētō-ʿeres* ("every beast of the earth," commonly interpreted as wild animals) as one of the basic categories of animals that came out of the ark.

⁵²Hartley, 103.

⁵³Art Hill, "On Universal Language," *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith* 55 (2003): 66.

⁵⁴Victor P. Hamilton writes: "I see no credible way of harmonizing the information of v. 5 with v. 4. V. 4 clearly states that the ark rested on one of the mountains of Ararat in the 17th day of the 7th month. Yet v. 5 states that no mountaintop was spotted until the first day of the 10th month" (*The Book of Genesis: Chapters 1-17*, NICOT [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990], 301). I suggest that the solution is found in the meaning of the word "rested" (Heb. *nūah*, "to be tranquil"). It does not necessarily imply that the ark has *landed* on one of the mountains, but only that it had become tranquil in the less turbulent waters surrounded by yet-submerged peaks of Ararat.

Gen 8:5). And finally, the Flood waters were not dried up (*yābšā*) enough for Noah to leave the ark until one year and ten days had passed (cf. Gen 7:11; 8:14). Such lengths of time seem commensurate only with a global and not a local flood.

23. *Terminology for the water activity during the Flood.* The receding activity of the water (Gen 8:3a, 54a) is described by the Hebrew phrase *hālōk wāšōb* (literally, "going and coming"). In parallel with similar phraseology and grammatical construction for the "to and fro" motion of the raven in the Flood narrative (Gen 8:7), this expression should probably be translated as "going and retreating,"⁵⁵ and implies oscillatory water motion, which lasted for 74 days (see Gen 8:3-5). The waters rushing back and forth, as in ocean tidal movement as the overall level gradually decreased, supports a universal interpretation but is incongruous with a local-flood theory.

24. *Terminology for the divine blessing after the Flood.* Exactly the same inclusive divine blessing is given to both Adam and Noah: *pērū ūrēbū ūmīP'ā 'et-hā'āreṣ* ("Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth"; Gen 1:28; 9:1). This is another linkage between universal creation and the universal Flood, between the original beginning and the "new beginning." As the human race at creation flows exclusively from Adam and Eve, so the postdiluvial humanity is populated exclusively through Noah and his three sons (Gen 9:19). Such could not be the case if only part of humankind outside the ark were destroyed by the Flood.

25. *Terminology for the covenant partners and sign after the Flood.* The Noahic covenant with its rainbow sign is specifically stated to include the whole earth and its inhabitants (Gen 9:9-17). God said to Noah: "The rainbow [*haqqeṣef*] shall be in the cloud, and I will look upon it to remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth" (v. 16). This universal relationship between God and the earth with all its inhabitants is repeated at least six times in the space of ten verses (vv. 9-10, 12, 13, 15, 16, 17). If these universalistic terms for God's covenant partners (e.g., "every living creature," "all flesh," "the earth") are to be taken only in a limited and less-than-global sense, then the covenant would be only a limited covenant and the rainbow sign of "the all-embracing universality of the Divine mercy"⁵⁶ would be stripped of its meaning.

26. *Terminology for the covenant promise after the Flood.* After the Flood God promises that "never again [*lō' . . . 'ôd*] shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of the flood; never again [*lō' . . . 'ôd*] shall there be a flood to

⁵⁵Steven A. Austin, "Did Noah's Flood Cover the Entire World? Yes." in *The Genesis Debate: Persistent Questions about Creation and the Flood*, ed. Ronald F. Youngblood (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1990), 218; Hasel, "Some Issues Regarding the Nature and Universality of the Genesis Flood Narrative," 93.

⁵⁶Franz Delitzsch, "Genesis," in *Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament: The Pentateuch*, Carl F. Keil and Franz Delitzsch, trans. James Martin (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), 1:289-290.

destroy the earth" (Gen 9:11). Verse 15 repeats the divine promise: "the waters shall never again [*lō . . . ôd*] become a flood to destroy all flesh." The viability of God's promise (cf. Isa 54:9) and the integrity of God in keeping his promise are critical in the worldwide extent of the Flood. *If Gen 6-9 describes only a local flood, then God has broken his promise every time another local destructive flood has happened!* The only way God's promise not to send another flood to destroy all flesh can be seen to have been kept is if the Flood was a universal one and the whole human race and all terrestrial creatures outside the ark were destroyed.

27. *Terminology that portrays the Flood as a divine "uncreation."* The first description of the Flood activity in the narrative of Gen 6-9 occurs in Gen 7:10: "and the waters of the Flood were upon the earth" (*umē hammabbûl hâyû 'al-hā'āreš*). This is followed immediately by the depiction of the source of the Flood waters in v. 11: "all the fountains of the great deep were broken up, and the windows of heaven were opened" (*kol-ma 'yēnôt tēhôm rabbâ wa^arubbôt haššāmāyim niptāhû*). These verses portray a divine act of "uncreation," reversing the action of Day 2 of creation week (in which God divided the waters above the firmament from the waters under the firmament, Gen 1:6-8), by which the earth is virtually⁵⁷ returned to the state before creation week, when the whole globe was covered by the "face of the deep [*tēhôm*]" (Gen 1:2). The Flood "uncreation" also involves a reversal of Day 3 of creation week, when God said, "Let the dry land appear" (Gen 1:9). During the Flood the ever-rising waters escalated until "all the high hills under the whole heaven were covered" (*wayēkussû kol-behārim bagg^abōhîm 'āšer-taḥat kol-haššāmāyim*) and "the mountains were covered" (*way^akussû behārim*) (Gen 7:19-20). Days 5 and 6 of Creation week were also reversed, as during the Flood, when the terrestrial animals which God created on these days (Gen 1:20, 24) were destroyed: "All in whose nostrils was the breath of the spirit of life, all that was on the dry land, died" (*kōl 'āšer nišmat-rûah ḥayîm bē'appāyw mikkōl 'āšer behārābâ mētû*; Gen 7:22).

Based upon the key expressions of these and other verses of the Flood narrative, a host of commentators have recognized that Gen 6-7 depicts a work of cosmic undoing or reversal of creation as divine judgment upon the antediluvian world. For example, Nahum Sarna writes that "the Flood is a cosmic catastrophe that is actually the undoing of creation. . . . In other words, creation is being undone, and

⁵⁷Obviously, the "uncreation" does not entail an absolute undoing of the Gen 1 creation week or there would be no survivors in the Ark. Those few who reject the motif of uncreation in the Flood narrative—because in the Flood fish survive and the plants are not destroyed and the sun and moon still function—simply miss the point (see Fretheim, 314, for such rejection). The virtual return of the earth to its precreation appearance, totally covered by water, is ample testimony to the virtually universal divine judgment of "uncreation" upon his creation, who have well-nigh universally rejected him. Such reversal of creation is confirmed by the renewal of creation after the Flood, following precisely the same order as Creation week, as discussed in the next point below.

the world returned to chaos.”⁵⁸ Tikva Frymer-Kensky describes the Flood as “the original, cosmic undoing of creation.”⁵⁹ Umberto Cassuto points out that at the high point of the Flood, “we see water everywhere, as though the world had reverted to its primeval state at the dawn of Creation, when the waters of the Deep submerged everything.”⁶⁰ For Joseph Blenkinsopp, “the deluge is an act of uncreation, undoing the work of separation by returning everything to the primeval, watery chaos from which the created order first arose.”⁶¹ Mathews describes the universal uncreation during the Flood: “Now the Lord sets in motion the un-creation of the world by releasing the powers that always stand ready to overwhelm life. The waters once separated will now be rejoined for the purpose of destruction. Earth’s disruption is comprehensive; ‘all’ the waters of the ‘great deep’ came forth. The immense flood-waters involve the flow of waters from below and from above, a merism indicating the complete transformation of the terrestrial structures.”⁶²

Gerhard von Rad vividly underscores the universal implications of this undoing or reversal of creation: “We must understand the Flood, therefore, as a catastrophe involving the entire cosmos. . . . Here the catastrophe, therefore, concerns not only men and beasts . . . but the earth (chs. 6.13; 9.1)—indeed, the entire cosmos.”⁶³ Harland devotes an entire chapter of his monograph on the Genesis Flood to the motif of “creation, uncreation, and re-creation,” demonstrating how the Flood narrative is a worldwide undoing of creation: “The story of the flood presents the reader with an almost complete reversal of the account of creation in Gen 1-2. . . . God alone is the sovereign Lord of all that exists and since he is the sole creator, so too he can become the uncreator of the world. . . . The flood returned the world to the pre-creation state of one large ocean.”⁶⁴ Only a cosmic/universal/global

⁵⁸Sarna, 48, 85.

⁵⁹Tikva Frymer-Kensky, “Pollution, Purification, and Purgation in Biblical Israel,” in *The Word of the Lord Shall Go Forth: Essays in Honor of David Noel Freedman in Celebration of His Sixtieth Birthday*, ed. Carol L. Meyers and M. O’Connor (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1983), 410; cf. idem, “The Flood,” in *Harper’s Bible Dictionary*, ed. Paul J. Achtemeier (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1985), 312.

⁶⁰Cassuto, *Genesis*, 97.

⁶¹Joseph Blenkinsopp, *The Pentateuch: An Introduction to the First Five Books of the Bible* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 83; cf. idem, “Uncreation: The Great Flood: Gen 6:5-9:17,” in *Pentateuch*, ed. Laurence Bright (New York: Doubleday, 1971), 46-47.

⁶²Mathews, 376.

⁶³Von Rad, *Genesis*, 128.

⁶⁴Harland, 89, 92. Among the many other scholars who recognize the Flood as a cosmic/universal reversal of creation, see, e.g., D. J. A. Clines, “Noah’s Flood: I: The Theology of the Flood Narrative,” *Faith and Thought* 100/2 (1972-1973): 136; Waltke, 139; Wenham, 180-183; and Claus Westermann, *Genesis 1-11: A Commentary*, trans. John J. Scullion (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1984), 434.

Flood can encompass the cosmic/universal/global reversal or undoing of creation described in Gen 6-9.

28. *Terminology depicting a cosmic re-creation after the Flood.* The cosmic reversal of creation is followed by a cosmic New Beginning. As D. J. A. Clines states: "The 'uncreation' which God has worked with the Flood is not final; creation has not been permanently undone. Old unities of the natural world are restored (8:22), and the old ordinances of creation are renewed (9:1-7)."⁶⁵ Jacques Doukhan, among others, has demonstrated the precise literary parallels between the successive stages of "re-creation" in the aftermath of the Flood (Gen 8-9) and the seven days of creation in Gen 1:2-2:3.⁶⁶

Day 1. The wind/Spirit (*rûah*) over the earth and waters. Gen. 8:1; cf. Gen. 1:2.

Day 2. Division of waters. Gen. 8:1-5; cf. Gen. 1:6-8.

Day 3. Appearance of dry ground and plants. Gen. 8:5-12; cf. Gen. 1:9-13.

Day 4. Appearance of light. Gen. 8:13-14; cf. Gen. 1:14-19.

Day 5. Emergence of animals (birds mentioned first). Gen. 8:15-17; cf. Gen. 1:20-23.

Day 6. Animals together with men, blessing, food for men, "male and female," image of God. Gen. 8:18-9:7; cf. Gen. 1:24-31.

Day 7. Universal sign of the covenant. Gen 9:8-17; cf. Gen. 2:1-3.

The linkage between Day 7 (the Sabbath) and the Flood narrative is also evident in God's response to Noah's burnt offering which Noah offered upon leaving the ark (Gen 8:21): God smelled "a soothing aroma," literally, an "aroma of rest [*hannîḥōah*]," utilizing a word from the same root *nûah* employed for God's "rest" on the Sabbath (*wayyānah*; Exod 20:11).⁶⁷

In this "re-creation" of the world, Noah is a new Adam; and, as noted above, he and his sons are given the same command as to Adam and Eve in Eden: "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth" (Gen 9:1; cf. Gen 1:28). This New Beginning is clearly presented as the beginning for the entire earth, as at the first creation week, and not just for a localized area such as Mesopotamia. Thus, in the overarching literary structure of the "re-creation" in the Flood narrative, the global dimension of the Flood is underscored by parallels with the global creation account of Gen 1:3-2:3.

29. *Terminology alluding to the Genesis Flood elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible.* As

⁶⁵Clines, "Noah's Flood," 138.

⁶⁶Adapted from Jacques B. Doukhan, *Daniel: The Vision of the End* (Berrien Springs: Andrews University Press, 1987), 133-134; cf. Gage, 10-20; Mathews, 383; Waltke, 128-129. Waltke and Mathews give even more precise verbal parallels than Doukhan, and slightly differ from him in their analysis in suggesting that there is no parallel between the Flood "recreation" and the fourth day of Creation because the sun and moon were not part of the uncreation. Further parallels to the fifth day of creation are shown with the birds that fly above the earth (Gen 8:6-12; cf. 1:20-23) and parallels to the sixth day of creation with the same basic list of animals (Gen 8:17-19; cf. 1:24-25).

⁶⁷Gage, 11, 16.

noted in point 18 above, the technical term for the Genesis Flood, *mabbûl*, appears only one time outside Genesis. Its utilization in Ps 29:10 underscores YHWH's universal sovereignty over the whole world at the time of the Noahic Flood as well as in the time of the Psalmist: "The Lord sat enthroned at the Flood [*mabbûl*], and the Lord sits as King forever."

Another certain allusion to the Genesis Flood appears in the phrase *mê-Noah* ("waters of Noah") in Isa 54:9, where the prophet records God's promise of future faithfulness in light of his promise made at the time of the Flood: "For this is like the waters of Noah to me: For as I have sworn that the waters of Noah would not flood the earth again, so I have sworn that I will not be angry with you nor rebuke you." Although by the time of Isaiah there had no doubt been many local floods of which he and his hearers were aware, it was possible for God to use the illustration of Noah's Flood only because it was clear to readers that Noah's Flood was worldwide, totally unlike any local flood since that time, and thus God's promise made in the time of Noah still stood even in the face of the subsequent occurrence of numerous local floods.

There are also many other possible OT allusions to the Noahic Deluge that utilize a variety of Hebrew expressions: *zerem* ("inundation, flood," Isa 28:2); *mayim kabbîrîm* ("mighty waters," Isa 28:2); *mayim rabbîm* ("great waters," Ps 18:17 [Eng. v. 16]), or simply *mayim* ("waters," Isa 43:2; Job 12:15; Ps 124:4); *nâhâr/nêhârôt* ("floods, streams," Ps 93:3); *rahab* ("storm, Rahab," Job 26:12); *šibbōlet* ("flood, flowing stream," Ps 69:3, 16 [Eng. vv. 2, 15]); and *šetep* ("overflowing, flood," Dan 9:26; Nah 1:8; Ps 32:6). The forcefulness of these descriptors may also point beyond local floods to include reference to a global Deluge.

30. *Universal terminology in NT references to the Flood.* The NT reflects the technical meaning of the Hebrew *mabbûl* and only employs the Greek term translated *kataklysmos* ("flood, deluge") with reference to the Genesis Flood (Matt 24:38, 39; Luke 17:27; and 2 Pet 2:5, plus once using the related verb *kataklyzō* ["flood, inundate"] in 2 Pet 3:6). The NT passages concerning the Flood all employ universal language: "swept them *all* [*hapantas*, plural, 'everyone'] away," Matt 24:39; "destroyed them *all* [*pantas*, pl. 'everyone']" (Luke 17:27); "he did not spare the ancient *world* [*kosmos*], but preserved Noah with seven other persons, . . . when he brought a flood upon the *world* [*kosmos*] of the ungodly," 2 Pet 2:5; "a few, that is eight persons, were saved through water" (1 Pet 3:20); Noah "condemned the *world* [*kosmos*]" (Heb 11:7). A local flood would not have ended the antediluvian world. Gleason L. Archer Jr. states: "We have the unequivocal corroboration of the New Testament that the destruction of the human race at the time of the flood was total and universal."⁶⁸

The NT Flood typology assumes and *depends upon* not only the historicity, but also the universality of the Flood to theologically argue

⁶⁸Gleason L. Archer Jr., *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction*, rev. ed. (Chicago: Moody, 1985), 208.

for an imminent worldwide judgment by fire (2 Pet 3:6-7). Peter argues that just as there was a worldwide, "eschatological" judgment by water causing the unbelieving antediluvian world to perish, so in the antitype there must be a global endtime judgment by fire, bringing about the destruction of the ungodly.⁶⁹

Along with the abundant terminological evidence for a universal/global Flood depicted by Gen 6-9, and elsewhere in Scripture, there is also the contextual, thematic evidence of Gen 1-11, to which we now turn.

Universal Themes in Genesis 1-11

The trajectory of major themes prior to the Flood narrative in Gen 1-5—creation, Fall, plan of redemption, spread of sin—is universal in scope and calls for a corresponding universal judgment.⁷⁰ Likewise, the trajectory of major themes following the Flood narrative in Gen 10-11 is universal. The universal themes of Gen 1-11, which forms the larger context for the Flood narrative, are briefly outlined below.

Universal Creation. We have noted in reference to specific Flood terminology the numerous allusions to the global context of creation. The creation week set forth in Gen 1 is clearly global and not local in scope.⁷¹

The Universality of Sin and the Plan of Redemption. Likewise, the Fall of humanity in Adam and Eve led to the sinful condition of the entire human race (*hā'ādām*), not just the inhabitants of Mesopotamia (cf. Gen 6:5, 11; Rom 3:19; 5:12). The Protoevangelium outlined in Gen 3:15 involves the universal moral struggle between the spiritual descendants (*zera'*, "seed," collective) of the serpent and the spiritual descendants (*zera'*, "seed," collective) of the woman, culminating in the victory of the representative Messianic Seed (*zera'*, "seed," singular with singular referents) over the serpent.⁷² This plan of redemption is certainly universal in scope.

In harmony with the universal dimensions of preceding themes in Gen 1-5, the sinful condition of humankind at the time of the Flood

⁶⁹See Davidson, *Typology in Scripture*, 326-327.

⁷⁰D. J. A. Clines, "Themes in Genesis 1-11," in *I Studied Inscriptions from Before the Flood: Ancient Near Eastern, Literary, and Linguistic Approaches to Genesis 1-11*, ed. Richard S. Hess and David T. Tsumura (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1994): 285-309.

⁷¹For further discussion of the global scope of the creation language of Gen 1, see my study, "The Biblical Account of Origins," *JATS* 14 (2003): 35-36. Throughout Gen 1, the numerous references to the scope of God's creation—to the "earth" that was formless and empty, and the darkness "upon the face of the deep" (v. 2), the dividing of the light and darkness (v. 3), the dividing of waters from waters (v. 6), the gathering of the waters into "seas" (v. 10), the making of the "greater light" and the "lesser light" to "give light on the earth" (vv. 14-18), the creation of the birds "to fly across the face of the firmament of the heavens" (v. 20), the creation of land animals and humans to "be fruitful and fill the earth, and have dominion over . . . everything that moves upon the earth" (vv. 26-28)—all these are unambiguously global in their scope.

⁷²See O. Palmer Robertson, *The Christ of the Covenants* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980); Afolarin Ojewole, "The Seed in Gen 3:15" (Ph.D. Dissertation, Andrews University, 2001).

includes more than those living in the Fertile Crescent. From *God's* perspective, not simply from the culturally conditioned local view of the narrator, there were worldwide results calling for the divine legal investigation: "And God saw that the wickedness of man (*hā'ādām*, humankind) was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually" (Gen 6:5). Such universal sinfulness naturally calls for universal judgment.

Universal Covenant. Unlike the other biblical covenants, the Noahic covenant is made not only with humankind, but with the whole earth (Gen 9:13), including every living creature (Gen 9:10, 12, 15, 16), and is thus completely unilateral and unconditional upon the response of the earth and its inhabitants. The sign of this everlasting covenant is the rainbow, which is not primarily for humankind, but for God to see and "remember" the covenant he has made with the earth (Gen 9:16).

Universal Genealogies and Dispersion of the Nations. The genealogical lines from both Adam (Gen 4:17-26; 5:1-31) and Noah (Gen 10:1-32; 11:1-9) are exclusive in nature, indicating that as Adam was father of all pre-Flood humanity, so Noah was father of all post-Flood humanity. Such exclusivity in the genealogies of Gen 4, 5, and 11 unequivocally portray the universality of both genealogical lines. From the descendants of Noah "the nations spread abroad on the earth after the flood" (Gen 10:32). The Table of Nations in Gen 10:1-31 makes evident the universal scope of this spreading far beyond the Mesopotamian valley. The Tower of Babel dispersion was God's means of scattering humanity across the globe, despite their intentions to congregate on the Plain of Shinar (Gen 11:1-19).

In the context of these numerous universal themes in Gen 1-11, if the Flood were merely local in extent, it would be the *only* restricted theme in these opening chapters of Genesis! Such a conclusion is hardly defensible. Rather, the Genesis Flood must be read just as universally as the other themes in Gen 1-11.

In light of the plethora of terminological and contextual evidence presented above, it is not surprising that the scholarly view in which Gen 6-9 describes a worldwide Flood is not a minority position in the history of interpretation. This, indeed, is the traditional Judeo-Christian understanding and the conclusion of a number of recent evangelical commentaries.⁷³ Furthermore, it is significant that virtually all modern critical scholars, who have no burden to seek to make the biblical text comport with a modern worldview, affirm that Gen 6-9 depicts not

⁷³See, e.g., Mathews, 365, commenting specifically on the inclusive language of Gen 6:17: "This inclusive language [in Gen 6:17] as elsewhere in this account [see 6:7, 12-13; 7:4, 19, 21-23; 8:21; 9:11, 15; cf. 2 Pet 3:6] suggests that the cataclysm was worldwide in scope. . . . This kind of inclusive language for local events is attested elsewhere in Genesis (e.g., 41:54-57), but the insistence of the narrative on the encompassing character of the flood favors the literal understanding of the universal view." Cf. Waltke, 133: "The narrator, even allowing for oriental hyperbole, seems to have in mind a universal flood."

simply a local but a worldwide Flood.⁷⁴ For example, in his recent critical study of the Genesis Flood narrative, Harland states: "The story [Gen 6-9] is not the record of a local flood. The text speaks of a universal, not a partial, flood: 6:17, 7:4, 21, 23, 8:21. All flesh died. . . . In Gen 7:4 the writer would hardly have thought that everything which God had made included only part of the world."⁷⁵

*Theories of Dependence on ANE Traditions vs.
Theories of Theological Polemic*

Theories of Dependence upon ANE Traditions

While acknowledging that the text of Gen 6-9 affirms a worldwide Flood, most critical commentators further assert that the biblical narrative is either directly borrowed from other ANE Flood stories or ultimately derives from a common original Mesopotamian Flood tradition. Terrence Fretheim is representative of the modern critical consensus: "The Genesis account should be related to a major flood in the Mesopotamian valley, which in time was interpreted as a flood that covered the then known world (one severe flood has been dated around 3000 BCE)."⁷⁶

Four main flood stories are found in ancient Mesopotamian sources: the Sumerian Eridu Genesis (ca. 1600 B.C.),⁷⁷ the Old Babylonian Atrahasis Epic (ca. 1600 B.C.),⁷⁸ the Gilgamesh Epic (Neo-Assyrian version, ca. eighth to seventh centuries B.C.),⁷⁹ and Berossus's account (Babylon, third century B.C.).⁸⁰

The major similarities between these ANE flood stories, on one hand, and the biblical account, on the other, have been rehearsed by many scholars⁸¹ and are conveniently summarized by Wenham as follows:⁸² a divine decision to destroy humankind; a warning to the flood hero; the command to build an ark; the hero's obedience; the command to enter the ark; the entry into the ark; the closing of the door; the description of the flood; the destruction of life; the end of rain, etc.; the ark grounding on a mountain; the hero opens a window;

⁷⁴See Gerhard F. Hasel, "The Biblical View of the Extent of the Flood," 78 and n. 16 for bibliography of representatives of this position, see, e.g., Fohrer, Koehler, Noth, Procksch, Skinner, Sarna, Speiser, von Rad, Vriezen, Zimmerli.

⁷⁵Harland, 3.

⁷⁶Fretheim, 388.

⁷⁷Thorkild Jacobsen, "The Eridu Genesis," *JBL* 100 (1981): 513-529.

⁷⁸See W. G. Lambert and A. R. Millard, *Atrahasis: The Babylonian Story of the Flood* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969).

⁷⁹See Alexander Heidel, *The Gilgamesh Epic and Old Testament Parallels* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1946).

⁸⁰See Lambert and Millard, 134-137.

⁸¹See especially the extended discussion by Heidel.

⁸²Wenham, 163-164.

the birds' reconnaissance; the exit from the ark; offering of a sacrifice; the divine smelling of the sacrifice; and a blessing on the flood hero.

Without denying the common elements between the Mesopotamian flood stories and the biblical Flood narrative, I do not believe it is necessary to assume either a direct or indirect dependence upon the Mesopotamian traditions. Rather, in light of the similarity between all these accounts and other flood traditions throughout the world, and even more, in light of the profound theological differences between the biblical account and all these other Flood stories, it seems preferable to regard all of these stories as testifying to the historicity of the Genesis Flood and to recognize the Genesis Flood narrative as constituting a direct polemic against the ANE Flood stories. This alternative is discussed in the next section.

The Flood as (Historically Veracious)⁸³ Theological Polemic

Ancient flood stories are almost universal; more than two hundred different stories are known.⁸⁴ A flood is by far the most frequently given cause for past world calamities in the folk literature of antiquity,⁸⁵ with the stories nearest to the area of the Dispersion at Babel closest in detail to the biblical account. A remarkable number of these oral and written traditions agree upon the basic points of the biblical account: all humankind was destroyed by a great flood as a result of divine judgment against human sin, and a single man and his family or a few friends survived the deluge in a ship or other seafaring vessel. While critical scholars generally maintain that "stories from other cultures should be traced back to their own local flood traditions,"⁸⁶ it seems just as plausible, and I think more likely, that this vast body of ancient witnesses to a worldwide Deluge is powerful testimony to the historicity and universality of the biblical Flood.

In contrast to the extrabiblical ANE flood stories, in which no cause of the flood is given (e.g., Gilgamesh Epic) or where the gods decide to wipe out their human slaves because they are making too much noise (e.g., Atrahasis Epic and Eridu Genesis), the biblical account provides a profound theological motivation for the Flood: humanity's moral depravity and sinfulness—the all-pervading

⁸³I place this reference to historicity in the heading because some think of a theological polemic as necessitating the misdrawing of history in the service of theology. I suggest that the biblical concept of polemic consists of theology that is radically rooted in what the narrator presents as real and accurate history.

⁸⁴James G. Frazer, *Folk-Lore in the Old Testament: Studies in Comparative Religion* (London: MacMillan, 1918), 1:105-361; Byron C. Nelson, *The Deluge Story in Stone: A History of the Flood Theory of Geology* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1931).

⁸⁵Stith Thompson, *Motif-Index of Folk-Literature: A Classification of Narrative Elements in Folktales, Ballads, Myths, Fables, Medieval Romances, Exempla, Fabliaux, Jest-Books, and Local Legends* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1955), 1:182-194.

⁸⁶So Fretheim, 388.

corruption and violence of all living beings ("all flesh") on earth (Gen 6:1-8, 11-12), which demands divine punishment.

This theological motivation provides a divine justification (theodicy) for bringing the Flood. In contrast to the gods of other ANE flood stories, who arbitrarily act out of unreasoning anger, selfishness, and caprice, and seek to deceive the people rather than inform them of the impending flood, the biblical God is far different. According to the biblical account, God, in response to humanity's corruption, repents (*nāḥam*, "is sorry, moved to pity, having compassion, suffering grief"; Gen 6:6) of his decision to create humanity. He extends a probationary period of 120 years during which his Spirit is striving with humanity to repent (Gen 6:3), warning the antediluvian world through Noah, the "preacher of righteousness" (2 Pet 2:5; cf. 1 Pet 3:19-20; Gen 6:14-16).

The portrayal of humanity's moral depravity as the cause of the flood highlights human responsibility for sin. The Flood comes about as a result of corruption and violence on the part of humankind. At the same time, Noah's response of faith/faithfulness (*pistis*; Heb 11:7) underscores that accountability to God is not only corporate, but individual: Noah found "favor" (*ḥēn*) in God's sight; he was "righteous" (*ṣaddiq*), "blameless" (*tāmim*), and "walked together" (*ḥālak*, Hithpael) in personal relationship with God (Gen 6:8-9); he responded in implicit obedience to his commands (Gen 6:22; 7:5, 9; cf. Ezek 14:14, 20).

Thus, God's act of destruction was not arbitrary. God "destroys" (*šāḥat*; Gen 6:13) what humanity had already ruined or corrupted (*šāḥat*; vv. 11-12), mercifully bringing to completion the ruin already wrought by humankind. Humankind's marring of God's creation is followed by God's judgment of cosmic uncreation. God's response to his chosen task is grief (*ʿāṣab*; Gen 6:6). The term *ʿāṣab* is the same Hebrew root used of the woman's "pain" and Adam's "anguish" (Gen 3:16, 17) in the divine judgment at the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, with the implication that God himself takes up humanity's pain and anguish.

The God of the biblical Flood is not only just and merciful; he is also free to act according to his divine will, possessing sovereign power and full control over the forces of nature (in contrast to the weakness and fright of the ANE gods during the Flood). Thus, the author's use of the two divine names, Elohim and YHWH, throughout the Flood narrative is intentional. Instead of indicating separate literary sources, the use of these names seems to highlight different aspects of God's character: the generic *Elohim* when his universal, transcendent sovereignty or judicial authority is emphasized; and the covenant name *YHWH* when his personal, ethical dealings with Noah and humankind are in view.⁸⁷

God's grace is revealed before the Flood in the 120 years of probation granted the antediluvian world (Gen 6:3) and in his directions for the

⁸⁷U. Cassuto, *The Documentary Hypothesis and the Composition of the Pentateuch*, trans. Israel Abrahams (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1961), 35-36; Leupold, 280-281.

building of the ark to save those faithful to him (Gen 6:14-21). The Flood narrative contains the first mention in the biblical canon of the motif and terminology of remnant: "Only Noah and those who were with him in the ark remained [*šāʾar*]" (Gen 7:23). The remnant who survived the cosmic catastrophe of the Flood were constituted thus because of their right relationship of faith and obedience to God, not because of caprice or the favoritism of the gods, as in the extrabiblical ANE flood stories.⁸⁸

The word *bērit* ("covenant") first appears in Scripture in connection with the Flood (Gen 6:18; 9:8-17), with the covenant motif playing an integral role in the Flood narrative. The Noahic covenant comes at God's initiative and demonstrates his concern, faithfulness, and dependability. He covenants never again to send a Flood to destroy the earth. This covenant promise flows from the propitiatory animal sacrifice offered by Noah (Gen 8:20-22).⁸⁹ In no other ANE flood story does a god bind himself by covenant to never bring a flood again upon the earth to destroy humankind.

All of this theological polemic in the biblical Flood narrative builds upon and depends upon the historical veracity and universality of the Flood events. A tenable divine theodicy is rooted in the necessity of an actual, worldwide Flood to bring universal judgment upon humankind for their rebellion, to bring cosmic uncreation upon a world that had rejected its Creator and marred his creation, and to bring about a new creation for the faithful remnant.

Conclusion

There is a rich theology in the unified biblical Flood narrative, but inasmuch as the literary genre of this narrative underscores the historical nature of the events narrated, the theology of the narrative cannot be divorced from—and in fact is rooted in—the historicity of the Flood account. Numerous lines of biblical evidence converge in affirming that the biblical Flood narrative describes a worldwide, global Deluge and not a limited, localized flood.

The questions of the historicity and worldwide nature of the Genesis Flood are not just a matter of idle curiosity with little at stake for Christian faith. They are pivotal in understanding and remaining faithful to the theology of Gen 1-11 and the rest of Scripture. The many links with the global creation in Gen 1-2 noted in this study not only support the aspect of universality in the Flood, but serve to theologically connect the protology

⁸⁸Numerous thematic and verbal parallels between the accounts of Noah's salvation and Israel's Exodus deliverance also reveal the author's intent to emphasize their similarity (John H. Sailhamer, "Genesis," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990], 2:89). Various references in the Psalms to God's gracious deliverance of the righteous from the "great waters" of tribulation may contain allusions to the Genesis Flood (Pss 18:16 [Heb. v. 17]; 32:6; 65:5-8 [Heb. vv. 6-9]; 69:2 [Heb. v. 3]; 89:9 [Heb. v. 10]; 93:3; and 124:4).

⁸⁹Wenham, 189-190.

and eschatology presented in the opening chapters of Scripture. The Flood is an eschatological “uncreation” of the world and humanity followed by a “re-creation” of the new world. “Thus, the story of the Flood—and this is theologically the most important fact—shows an eschatological world judgment. . . . The world judgment of the Flood hangs like an iron curtain between this world age and that of the first splendor of creation.”⁹⁰

The theology of the universal Flood is, therefore, the pivotal point of a connected but multifaceted universal theme running through Gen 1-11, constituting an overarching pattern for the rest of Scripture: worldwide *creation* revealing the character of the Creator and his original purpose for creation; humankind’s turning from the Creator and the universal spread of sin ending in the global “*uncreation*” through eschatological judgment; and *re-creation* in the eschatological salvation of the faithful covenant remnant and the global renewal of the earth.

⁹⁰Von Rad, 129-130.